

# THE LACLEDE BLADE.

A. J. CAYWOOD, Publisher.

LACLEDE. - - - MISSOURI.

## Lavender Creighton's Lovers

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### CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

The man with the rifle paused, then, under brows that met in a sinister bar, he demanded: "How are ye goin' to prove it would a done any hurt? How d'ye know the gun warn't aimed true?"

Sharp and clear rang the answer: "By the bullet in the post. See!" and the octoroon pointed to where, cheated of softer burial, the bit of lead lay firmly imbedded in the wood.

Winslow stepped alongside; it was just as high as his heart. All eyes were turned to the boatman, who met the stare unflinching. Somebody muttered: "She spoilt a d—d good shot;" and at this voicing of the general suspicion, an angry murmur rose.

But the bully was undismayed. "Accidents will happen, he said, and coolly swaggered below.

### CHAPTER X.

On arrival in St. Louis the Creightons were met by Mr. Creighton, and at once proceeded to their place near St. Charles.

Most of those who had come in the boat remained for a time in St. Louis, but all seemed waiting—expecting, they knew not what.

For Winslow, too, there was nothing to do but wait, although most eager to accept the Creighton's urged hospitality. The governor was absent in the south; it was therefore, impossible for Winslow to deliver the packet which Aaron Burr had entrusted to him. But in his anxiety to know the whereabouts and errand of Wilkinson, he made haste to call upon the deputy. To his surprise, he was refused admission. Twice later he was denied with insufficient reason. Had an ill wind preceded him with tidings which made his presence difficult?

One night he strode impatiently up and down the vine-covered porch in front of the tavern. Dreading failure of the plans of Aaron Burr, he was made still more lonely by the loss of companionship which had grown so dear, and turned into sweet the bitter of exile.

Suddenly there was a clamor of hoofs outside, and two men dismounted at the wicket.

A boy ran forward to hold the horses, and the riders entered the yard. With eyes upon Winslow, they walked with steady, business-like mien to where he stood. Then the taller threw aside a heavy cloak, displaying the dingy uniform of a sergeant. Lay-



"YOU ARE MY PRISONER."

ing a heavy hand upon Winslow's shoulder, he exclaimed: "You are my prisoner."

Charles stared and gave a long whistle. "Perhaps this is the custom of your settlement," he said, "to arrest all persons found stirring after night-fall. This must be a free translation of the curfew, for I plead guilty only to being awake."

But the would-be captor was not jocularly disposed. "You will soon laugh out of the other side of your mouth, young man (if that gibbering deputy knows his business)," he added, under breath.

Then continued: "You're wanted for treason; come on!"

The old story! Winslow's patience exhausted, he flung off the soldier's grasp. "You are an ignorant ass to come to me at this hour with no warrant—no show of authority. Who are you?"

But the man gave only surly answers, and Winslow at last exclaimed, impatiently: "There is little satisfaction in talking to a deaf hireling. Take me to the deputy."

"Take you to h—ll!" the sergeant retorted. "My orders are my orders, and that's all there is about it."

He did not explain how much it gratified his morose temper to show power over one whose small-clothes of camel, gentlemanly hose and air of quality, formed too light a figure against the dark background of his own greasy uniform and uncouth appearance.

However, he grudgingly indulged Winslow in his quest about the town for Gonzaga. Winslow thought the foreigner would vouch for him, and possibly assist him in obtaining his release.

But Gonzaga was nowhere to be found; it was said he had left the tavern for some near-by settlement.

Gone? To the settlement? Probably to St. Charles—to Lavender, was Winslow's first jealous fear.

For a little while he detained the chafing soldier, and penned a few lines. This done, he summoned Owatoga. The Indian's hound-like glance instantly took in all the occupants of the room. As Winslow handed him the note, it was intercepted by the sergeant with a swaggering air of command. Instinctively Winslow's hand sought his belt as if reaching for a sword, but he withdrew it at once with a shrug of disdain.

But the Indian had seen the significant action, and accepted its purpose literally. With the spring of a panther he was upon the soldier, pushing him to his knees. Brandishing a knife, he held it threateningly over him, then turned to Charles with an air of inquiry, which said as plain as words: "What shall I do with him?"

It was all done as a lightning flash. But at Winslow's sharp command the Indian relaxed his hold, permitting the terrified soldier to rise.

"Forgive the zeal of my friend here," Charles said, lightly; "only be careful to treat me well when he is about."

Turning to his champion he said, aside: "Take this note to her."

Then to the soldier: "I will not go with you tamely to some God-forsaken hole, there to rot through the stupidity of the law. Escort me first to your officer-in-chief, whoever he is. I want to inquire into this high-handed proceeding."

Cowed by his experience with the Indian, the sergeant consented without demur, and they went direct to the deputy's house.

Here they waited in a gloomy room where prevailed neither pioneer simplicity nor the real comforts of civilization, but an incongruous blending of both. Here were small barred windows that seemed rather to imprison the cold, damp air within than to afford opening for the sunlight. A few formal chairs mocked the visitor from a circle about a fireless hearth.

Announced by a cough, and a loud clearing of his throat, there entered the man temporarily in authority. Tall, military and aggressive in appearance, yet with good humor beaming in his kindly eyes, and around the corners of his childishly curved mouth. No American born, evidently, but a soldier of fortune whose skin was not more changed by many suns than his heart by service under many flags.

He acknowledged the sergeant's salute by a flourish of condescension, and addressed Winslow. "Bon soir, monsieur, the matter—what may it be?"

Winslow answered, hotly: "That is what I came here to find out, sir." With a shrug the other said: "But I cannot give you light, monsieur. I am here only pour passer le temps, while the real deputy removes himself elsewhere. M. le Gen. Wilkinson is absent."

It was on the point of Winslow's tongue to criticize the management which would leave the arrest of persons, innocent or guilty, to unfamiliar hands, but he refrained, and the officer said, his accent a curious mixture of French and Spanish: "I am told, however, that you are a dangerous man who comes here on service of—how you call him—M. Burr?"

The tone and manner was apologetic, but the words opened old sores. With fire in his eyes, his voice shaking with suppressed emotion, Winslow told his story frankly, concluding: "Now you know, sir, why I am beginning to feel like an Ishmaelite. I meant before to have disclosed my business, but was denied opportunity. It is evident some babbler has preceded me, prating to ears already prejudiced by political bias, against a man whom the nation should delight to honor."

From beneath elevated brows his hearer smiled. "There is verity in your remarks, monsieur, but until this expedition matter is settled our orders are to detain you. We will make it as pleasant as possible for you, monsieur," he hastened to add. "It is only that your presence with us seems desirable—for the present. I am not able to say that so distinguished a person should at once be free, though, sans doute, it should be so. May I have your parole d'honneur to remain with us in St. Louis until we have word from the powers that be?"

Winslow hesitated for an instant only, then his brow cleared. "You have my word of honor, your excellency" (and at the title the other coughed with gratified vanity), "and I must thank you for even this much

courtesy. From the jaw threatened by this man here (and he made a slighting gesture toward the sergeant) "Is escape enough for the present. But by the way, monsieur, will you kindly tell me where Gen. Wilkinson is?"

The deputy coughed again—this time deprecatingly. In the south, making light upon the plans of your friend, Burr."

Winslow knitted his brows. "Doing what, monsieur?"

As well as his imperfect English, and vague knowledge permitted, the deputy explained the reason for Wilkinson's absence, but one fact alone was clear—the general was on an errand that boded no good to the plans of Aaron Burr. Indeed, from what little he could glean from the non-committal Frenchman, Winslow realized that Burr was mistaken in reckoning upon the friendship and cooperation of the general. To be sure, there might be a mistake on the part of the deputy, or he might, himself, mistake the latter's meaning. Nevertheless, so long as there remained a doubt of Wilkinson's attitude so long was it unwise to further



"YOU WILL GIVE IT TO THE WHITE MAIDEN—QUICK!" HE DEMANDED.

acquaint him with Aaron Burr's designs.

All this went through his mind as he listened to the foreign's muddled explanation. The packet of letters was in his pocket—"and they shall stay there," was Winslow's mental comment, as he grimly buttoned his coat, "until I am better acquainted with the temper of the man to whom they are addressed."

He was bowing himself out, when the deputy detained him. "Some wine, monsieur," and from a shelf he brought decanter and goblets.

At this unique turn of threatened imprisonment Winslow's spirits rose.

"This is from the Tyrol land, monsieur," cried the host, "where we may have every season for the simple taking of a journey up or down the mountain side. Is summer, or winter, desired? voila; you have it; and the grapes—eh, bien! the winepress is more glorious crimson than the field of battle. Let us drink to your speedy release from parole, monsieur."

"Thanks," and they touched glasses. On the tip of Winslow's tongue hovered another toast, but to that he sipped a silent draught.

Then: "Let us drink to the stars and stripes, your excellency."

"Oui, oui," acceded the other, and drained his goblet, responding to the honor of the American flag as eagerly as though it were the only emblem under which he had ever drawn sword.

Returning to the tavern, Winslow penned a second note to Lavender. In this he told her of his detention at St. Louis.

"I shall be here indefinitely, I fear, or until this absurd embargo is lifted. Under this I could not leave now, even should I have command from our chief. But the authorities may soon come to their senses, and then I shall steal away to you."

In a postscript he added: "Someone on board our boat gave the information which led to my arrest and detention here. I cannot learn who the busybody was—nor does it matter. This whole affair is so perplexing that I do not worry about trifles."

To Owatoga he confided the missive. "You need not deliver that first note I wrote, Owatoga. Instead, find her and give her this."

The Indian started at once for the village of St. Charles, 20 miles away, on that river which augmented the Mississippi with its yellow mud.

He had covered half the distance when he came upon a party of men and women, most of whom had been his fellow-passengers on the boat. They were westward bound, many of them to the settlement of St. Charles. They had heard of this place as the destination of the Creightons, and even this much knowledge gave them a feeling of familiarity. To know even the name of a future home was much in this unchristened wilderness.

There was the planter from New Orleans, the ruined player of many games; he must retrieve them in this new land, and St. Charles would do as well as another spot on which to try the dice of fortune.

The octoroon, faithful, followed him. Senor Gonzaga, too, rode with him. Recognizing Owatoga, he attempted

to open a conversation with him, but the Indian was unwilling—instinct told him where this man was going, and why. So he only responded by a curt: "I follow the sun," to the Spaniard's: "Whither bound, my friend?"

The travelers were encamped about a small spring, and Owatoga paused long enough to water his horse, and rode quickly on.

But Gonzaga overtook him, and spoke low. "You are bent on an errand for your master?"

The reply to this was a surly grunt. "You are the bearer of a note to Miss Creighton?" the questioner persisted.

The Indian touched his pocket significantly.

From the Spaniard's eyes flashed a smile of triumph, and emboldened by his success thus far, "perhaps I might deliver it to the lady, and save you the trouble?" he ventured.

At this the Indian frowned, and his ruddy face darkened. But only for an instant, then his hand sought the pocket again, and withdrew the note.

Handing it to Gonzaga. "You will give it to the white maiden—quick?" he demanded.

The effusive reply seemed to satisfy him, for putting spur to his pony Owatoga set off alone.

But at the end of a vista of budding trees he paused, and looked slyly over his shoulder. Then from his saddle-bag he pulled another note. Satisfied that it was the last one which Winslow had entrusted him, he pushed it back with a grin of cunning, and rode on.

The Spaniard, too, smiled as he joined the more leisurely group. He read the note Owatoga had given him, then tore it into tiny pieces. Blowing these into the air. "Go, pretty words," he whispered, "bear my greeting to the robins. Tell them you will make a warm lining for their nests in summer. Yes, by all the gods, a warm lining!"

### CHAPTER XI.

The smoke from a frontier cabin curled lazily out of the chimney, and mingled straight with the clouds. There was no breeze at this twilight hour—the pulse of the world was still, waiting the set of sun. Slowly he sank, entangled in a network of trees—trees newly robed in the sparse yellow-green of April.

Some fowls picking among the gravel outside scurried away as a woman came to the door, and, shading her eyes with her hand, looked across the small clearing, and the road skirting it, to the forest beyond.

"Daughter, supper is ready." Her voice had a weary note, but she smiled at sight of Lavender perched on the top step of the stile. The girl was watching the sunset—subdued by the mystical beauty of the hour. She was oppressed by an intense eagerness to grasp and hold the glory; saddened by the effort to feel enough. To her exuberant soul, life seemed worthy of much more than grudging nature gave. The sky was bathed in a flood of bronze and gold, with the tawny arms of the dying sun stretched to the zenith as in benediction on the world.

At one side of the stile stood a great pine—dead, but with here and there a faithful cone clinging to the branches.

A plowed field near showed an occasional bit of grass on its dark surface, as though the virgin soil were tired waiting for the tardy sowing of the farmer. On a mullein stalk a butterfly shook its trampled wings free of the web which a guardian spider had spun over the rose that tempted this gay wooer.

"Lavender," Mrs. Creighton called, and, waving her bonnet at the butterfly, the girl jumped to the ground, and walked reluctantly to the house, with backward glances at the gorgeous obsequies of the sun.

[To Be Continued.]

### Logical Naturalist.

Cuvier, the naturalist, while a young man incurred the enmity of certain of his colleagues, who decided to give him a severe fright by dressing one of their number in the conventional garb of Satan and making a midnight call upon him. It is presumable that being aroused from a sound sleep, Cuvier was duly impressed with the figure before him, and that some of the threats made were having the desired effect. But finally, in a last effort to overwhelm him, the devil threatened to eat the young scientist. This was a fatal mistake, for Cuvier, at once reassured, eyed the grotesquely clad figure from head to toe and exclaimed: "What, horns and hoofs and carnivorous! Never!" He then rolled over and went to sleep.—Scientific American.

### In 1914.

She was reading from the society column, and said aloud:

"They were married at high noon." "What time were they divorced?" he inquired, absent-mindedly. — Detroit Free Press.

### An Equilibrist.

"How can he balance his books so quickly?"

"By juggling the figures."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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